

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

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Sermon Text: 2 Peter 1:16-21 (and Mark 9:1-13)

Sermon Title: "Transformation Is Happening, Believe It or Not" (Transfiguration Sunday)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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I remember the first time I experienced God on a deep, visceral level. July 1985, I was going to be a senior in high school in a few months. It was night, and the youth director told me that I needed a change in my life. He knew of my parents' separation and divorce, and knew that I was still upset with my dad for leaving us for another woman; and so my youth director told me that I needed God to completely alter my life. "Accept Christ into your life," he said, and told me to pray. I did, and everything changed. I felt as light as a feather. The night itself was not as dark as it had been – it was nearly midnight when my youth director and I prayed together. I could literally see every star in the sky, all the way up to Pluto (which I still view as one of the nine planets). Life was never the same for me since.

Peter has an interesting story to share with the Christians, to whom he writes in his second letter. Peter remembers the time when Jesus led him and two other disciples up a very tall mountain, and on that

mountain Jesus became nothing like Peter or the two other men had ever seen before. “We were eyewitnesses to his majesty,” Peter says, remembering that day in which he thought he was going on a nice little hike with his master, and then suddenly the whole world was turned on its head.<sup>1</sup> Jesus turned into this shining figure, an exceedingly brilliant figure that seemed as brilliant as the sun. All Peter and the other men could see was white, much whiter than any detergent could make a dress or robe white. Whiter than the snow, if we could believe it. When fresh snow is sitting on the ground, and then the bright sun hits it, there is no possible way of looking at it without putting on sunglasses. The sun coming off the snow seems to burn the retinas in our eyes.

Peter tries to paint the picture of the magnificence that he encountered, but not enough words can explain the experience of just being there. Light. Majesty. The booming voice of God ringing in their ears. The subtle conversation between Jesus and Elijah and Moses. Peter’s heart must have been pumping out of his chest. He had to be dumfounded and confused by what he was experiencing. And yet he was in the presence of Jesus, and with Jesus anything can happen. What happens most of the time is transformation, a complete overhaul of our minds,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. 2 Peter 1:16.

hearts, spirits, and bodies.

After reading what Peter said in his second letter, and then after reading the Gospel story in Mark 9, I could not help but think that something doesn't sound right.

Peter tells his readers that he was there. He had a marvelous encounter with God, a life-altering mountaintop experience that changed his life forever. And yet, I ask the question, "What about the other nine disciples on the bottom of that mountain?" They weren't there to see the face of God at Jesus' transfiguration. They weren't there to understand who Jesus really was as God's only Son. Majesty didn't surround them that day, so they were at a disadvantage, aren't they? They didn't have a great story to tell, and they cannot say that, for one moment, they saw God like Peter did.

And then it makes me think about Peter's readers. They weren't there, so they didn't have a life-altering experience with God. We weren't there, either. We were not on the mountain, and we might not be able to think of a time when we saw the majesty of God like a brilliant light or like newly-fallen snow. Does it take such encounters to really know God? Do we have to have such amazing encounters to have faith in God?

I've been reading a Kindle book on my iPad, which was written by the people of Willow Creek Church, that huge church just outside of Chicago. Their book explores why people fall out of faith and become dissatisfied with their churches. People who were surveyed for the book said that they felt their spiritual growth had stalled for some reason.<sup>2</sup> They were on fire about God and reading the Bible, participating in worship and Life Groups, serving the church in every way they could. But then they hit this wall. Their spiritual growth just "stalled," ran out of gas, and they didn't know why.

The authors of this Willow Creek book interviewed these frustrated people, asking them about their daily routines; and they discovered that their growth stalled mainly because their lives are too busy. We say that we live busy lives, but what makes us so busy? The daily demands of commuting to and from work, the daily demands of taking our kids to and from school events, cranky bosses wanting more work from us, dirty diapers that need changing right away, and financial shortfalls that causes us to work even harder. It doesn't matter if we see ourselves as Spiritually Mature Christians or New Seeking Christians, all of us deal with busyness. Sadly, pastors may be found high on that list of people with

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<sup>2</sup> Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*, Chapter 10.

little time on their hands.

And so what happens next is that our spiritual growth stalls. We read less, we pray less, we participate less, we worship less. All those spiritual disciplines that help us to grow closer to God are pushed aside. When our spiritual disciplines are pushed aside, so is God. We may or may not believe God is present with us in church. If worship is just something we attend without much meaning, then we will not notice that God is here. We leave this place, and we certainly do not believe God is present with us in our daily routines. God doesn't seem as "real" out there. God doesn't seem as personal and loving out there. We continue to lose touch with God, as we get even busier.

And then, the salt is placed in our wounds. Somebody like Peter comes along and says, "I was there. I have seen God like I have never seen him before." How did a person like Peter have the time to see God, when we can barely feel God's presence? How is he able to experience God, when we cannot? Is there something wrong with us? Have we truly lost our religion?

After Peter tells his readers that he was an eyewitness to the majesty of God, he shows his readers how they too may encounter God. In fact, all of Peter's

second letter deals with knowing God more intimately, listening for his good word amid all the clatter we hear every day. But in verses 19 and 21, Peter mentions how we may experience God each day, so we don't want to read over those words and miss them.

Peter says in verse 19, "So we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed *as a light that shines in a dark place.*" "Seek the LORD while he may be found," the prophet Isaiah tells us, "call upon him while he is near."<sup>3</sup> God is out there – God is present in the darkness of our busy lives. We need to simply search for him, like finding a bright gem in the dirt. For the readers of Peter's letter, they could seek the Lord in the marketplaces while they haggle over food. They could seek God while cooking or cleaning, while fishing or tending to the sheep. Actually, fishing is a great analogy for this idea of seeking out the Lord. Fishing takes great, great patience. It takes a lot of planning and waiting, and when the moment is right striking with the right amount of effort. When one fish is captured, the fisher goes after another. Same with those readers of Peter's letter: they could seek the Lord in everything they did, and when they caught a glimpse, look for another.

In our modern-day lives, seeking the Lord as a light shining in the darkness should happen while

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 55:6

driving to work in the morning and driving home at night. If we are going to sit in long traffic jams anyway, why not shut off the radio and simply speak with God? If you are embarrassed, put the phone to your head as though you are speaking with somebody. You are speaking with somebody: God. Simply talk with God about what is going on, and seriously request God to guide you through the plans and projects that are going on.

Seek God while you are cooking, if that is your thing. Put on a good Christian radio station, and praise the Lord while cooking. Seek God while attending class. As a student, pray that you might actually understand what is being taught; or as a teacher, pray that whatever you are teaching comes across plainly enough. Seek God in our hobbies, in our chores, before going to bed and after waking up. “You will find God,” Moses says in Deuteronomy, “if you look for God with all your heart and with all your soul.”<sup>4</sup>

We don’t have to have mountaintop experiences in order to be radically transformed by God. Small moments with little transformations are just as important, if not more important, in our hectic daily routines. “We do well to heed [God] as a light that shines in a dark place,” Peter says. Sometimes that

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<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 4:29.

light is small, but it is there. God is with us, no matter where we go. Seek him out.

Peter also says in verse 20-21 in Chapter 1 that the prophetic word of God doesn't come by the will of a man or woman, but holy people of God spoke those words *as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*. People moved by the Holy Spirit. Do we believe we are moved by the Holy Spirit? If not, then how did we get up from bed this morning? Do not say that it was a good night's sleep that did it, or the fact that we didn't eat too much food late last night. It is the Holy Spirit that motivated us to answer the alarm, sit up in bed, put our feet on the floor, and move ourselves to the shower or to the kitchen.

How do we come up with good ideas, when they are need? Do not say that it is our strong intellect, or that the problem was so easy to solve, or we slept in a Holiday Inn the night before. It is the Holy Spirit that puts the answers in our minds, if we are to get the answers in the first place. The Holy Spirit opens the path to follow, so we may come to good conclusions.

How do we get along with people? How do we help people in need? How do we worship and grow spiritually? We are people moved by the Holy Spirit in every way.

Imagine the Spirit as an invisible force that takes



us from place to place. The Spirit is the invisible force that opens our hearts and minds to new possibilities, especially when we feel stuck in a rut. The Holy Spirit is the beacon light that shines in the darkness, so that we may see God. The Holy Spirit takes us over to the light, so we may understand what God is doing through us.

There is no way that Peter could have seen Jesus in such a marvelous light on that mountaintop, if it weren't for the Holy Spirit opening him up to such a wild experience. There is no way he could do ministry in God's name, if it weren't not for the Holy Spirit giving him the words, and giving him the ability to speak those words.

We are people moved by the Holy Spirit, yes, even you. The Holy Spirit wants us to know that we are not alone, not abandoned. The Holy Spirit wants us to encounter God every day, having small encounters with little life-altering experiences, so we may grow and flourish.

We might not have been there, as Peter was. We might not have experienced God in such a wild way as Peter and the other two disciples did. But we are here, in this moment, with God. We hear God's word, if not subtly at times. We see God moving, if not faintly at times. God is transforming us, reshaping our lives, if

not slowly at times. This is the day that the Lord gives us to know him, to worship him, to serve him, even as a small light shining in the darkness of this distressed world.